

HIAWATHA THE GREAT.

BY

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To what lover of English literature does Hiawatha not live and breathe? The mystic son of Mudjekeewis, child of the wigwam, prophet of the forest, brother of the winds, slayer of Pau-puk-keewis, hero of the haunting measures of Longfellow; who,

“ With his mittens, Minjekahwin
Smote great caverns in the sandstone,
Cried aloud in tones of thunder,
Open! I am Hiawatha!

Called imploring on the tempest,
Called Waywassimo the lightning,
And the thunder Ahnemeekee;
And they came with might and darkness
Sweeping down the big Sea-water
From the distant Thunder Mountains.”

The depiction of this character is in general accepted as a triumph of the poet's imaginative genius, weaving a few rude ideas and native tales into an artistic and substantially original creation, rather than a correct note of Indian thought and fancy. This impression is both false and true:

false, in that the native ideas and tales which Longfellow found and used were already so artistic and imaginative that he had only to compose and not to invent; true, in that the skill and study* with which he treated his subject did actually attain to a correct note of Indian thought and fancy.

In the glorious parks of the Great Spirit there may still be met not a few good old Iagoos, whose kindly confidence it is not impossible to win, by lakeside or fireside, with a

“Tell us now some tale of wonder,
Tell us of some strange adventure;”

and those who have done so know well, by the fascinating interest of what they have heard, in the long and willing reply, the truth of the phrases,

“A nation’s legends
That like voices from afar off
Call to us to pause and listen,
Speak in tones so plain and child-like,
Scarcely can the ear distinguish
Whether they are sung or spoken.”

But it is not generally known, though it might well have been suspected, that Longfellow not merely trusted to skill and study, but drew his best material at first hand from some of the Ojibway people, and particularly from a man of wonderfully poetical imagination and language, the late chief Pukwuinini (the Fairy), whose beautiful discourses

* The inspiration derived by Longfellow from the Kalevala, the “Epic of Finland,” is outside of the present considerations.

are reported on good authority to have been the prose equivalent of ever-flowing fresh chapters of the 'Hiawatha' poem.

But if Longfellow attained to truth of imagination and feeling, and sought some of his information at first hand, there was one point in which he was misled; and while it was a point not at all necessary to his purpose, it is one of considerable moment from other points of view, especially that of history. He depicts Hiawatha as an Ojibway or an Algonquin. Now the name Hiawatha is not even an Algonquin word, and the character properly so named has only a remote resemblance to his hero. The character he paints is purely legendary, and his true name is Manabozho (or Nanabozho, as some render the form). Longfellow was misled by an error of Schoolcraft, who, pretending to be the great authority of his day on Indian matters, imposed upon the world of scholarship a tissue of theories and errors of his own which he unhesitatingly mixed with the crude mass of facts in his publication. Schoolcraft undertook to assert that Hiawatha and Manabozho were the same person. As a matter of fact the latter was Algonquin, while Hiawatha was Iroquois, and few peoples have been more dissimilar. Furthermore, Hiawatha was no mere fiction; he was a man who lived and performed a great national work, the effects of which survive till the present, and deeply influence the history of our own race and of the world. The object of this paper is to sketch his interesting career.

Hai-en-Wat-ha was a chief of the Ononondaga

tribe, one of the Five Nations, whose territory was in Central and Western New York. Aboriginal tradition attributes his epoch to various degrees of antiquity, and that which is most accepted ascribes it to the fourteenth century. Recently discovered facts, however, make it tolerably certain that it was in the latter half of the sixteenth, as it appears to have been at that epoch that the whole of the five tribes whom he formed into the Great League, which was his crowning achievement, came into mutual contact.

Who were these Five Nations? This people, otherwise known as the Iroquois, and later as the Six Nations, and in modern days among themselves as the Seven Nations, and always as the *Kanonsiounni*, or Long House People, and *Onkwe Onwe*, or Real Men, were found by the French of New France and the Dutch of New Netherland occupying a large territory which roughly corresponds to the present State of New York from the Hudson River westward. At a later period they were enabled, by the use of firearms, to dominate the greater part of North America east of the prairies, and to make their mark as the most formidable savage people of modern history. They were very different in their stage of culture from the rude, wandering, and simple-minded Algonquians, who sparsely inhabited the vast regions surrounding them, and who lived by hunting: for they dwelt in palisaded towns, around which their women and slaves cultivated ample crops of maize, beans, and squash, and their men the noble crop tobacco; they made excellent pottery, and lived in large and long communal

houses of bark, sometimes more than a hundred and fifty feet long; they held council continually until they became masters of eloquence and far-reaching policy; were experts in military art in the Indian style, and were bound together in a most remarkable confederation known as the *Kayanerenh Kowa*, or the Great League. Of this Hiawatha was the founder. He was no impossible son of Mudjekeewis, but a great statesman, a real historical figure.

The study of Iroquois history, though a small and restricted field, is divided of recent years, like some others, into two amicable opposing camps—the “traditional” school, and the “critical.” The former, headed by the late Dr. Horatio Hale, editor of the ancient ‘Book of Rights,’ is disposed to attach much importance to the accounts of their past held by the leading chiefs and record keepers; while the latter, leaning more upon archaeology, is led to doubt the correctness of verbal testimony, and to check it by the examination of relics and town sites, and by taking stock of all the details and comparisons which afford actual points of *appui* of indisputable fact, and therefore of sound departure, for historical judgments. The controversy has not hitherto set any of the great rivers aflame, but it is not without its fascination and seriousness as a chapter in the record of mankind.

The best traditional view of the origin of the Iroquois is that they originated on the lower St. Lawrence as one people with the Hurons; that the Huron-Iroquois stock then quarrelled and broke into two, the Hurons going westward to Lake Huron, the Iroquois going as one people to their country in

Western New York, in which they were found by the whites stretched out in five contiguous tribal divisions. Then, in the fourteenth century, the great Hiawatha induced them to form a permanent League, and established their General Council on a fixed hereditary basis, the chiefs of to-day being descendants of its first chiefs through the line of the mother.

The adherents of the critical school, on the other hand, point out the scarcity of old town sites in the country of the Mohawks and Oneidas, two of the Five Nations, and the numbers of European articles found on nearly all such town sites, and draw the conclusion that these two tribes cannot have been ancient holders of their territories, and must have arrived in them only a short time before the arrival of the whites,—that is to say, not much before the end of the sixteenth century. As careful examination of early French historical records supports the version of the critical school, I shall proceed on the basis of that version, dismissing the other.

Previously to the formation of the League it appears that the Iroquois had consisted of two related peoples, branches of the widely spread group of nations known as the Huron-Iroquois stock, which included the fierce Cherokees far, far to the south, and the populous and gentle Hurons to the north, all of whom had taken possession of immense territories heretofore occupied by the Algonquin tribes. The two branches which united to make up the Five Nations, and who spoke two different dialects, were the *Sinnekes* and the *Caniengas* (or Mohawks), of whom the former were divided into

the Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas, and the latter into the Mohawks and their offshoot the Oneidas. The Cayugas were an offshoot of the Onondagas. In the language of their diplomacy, the Oneidas and Cayugas were the "younger brothers" of the Mohawks and Onondagas respectively.

According to the historical theory now accepted by some of the best authorities, the manner in which the Sinnekes and Caniengas came into contact was this:—The former had been established for a long time in their several adjoining territories in Western New York, where they carried on a bitter warfare against the Hurons of the north. The Caniengas had been established in an isolated manner for several generations at Hochelaga (Montreal) and other places on the lower St. Lawrence, cut off by distance from communication with the main bodies of the Huron-Iroquois stock in the west, and living a peaceful life in the midst of the Algonquin population of the region, and there they were found in 1534-42 by Jacques Cartier, whose historiographer briefly describes their condition. Somewhere about 1560 they fell into a dispute with the neighbouring Algonquins, who invited the Hurons to come down from the west and attack them. The combined foes defeated the Caniengas; the Hurons burnt their chief town Hochelaga, which was ingeniously palisaded, and in the course of a war which had raged over fifty years in 1608, when the next French discoverer Champlain arrived, the Caniengas were driven from the St. Lawrence and were pressed down Lake Champlain. At the same time they became converted from a peaceable people into

desperate warriors and crafty councillors. It was evidently somewhere towards the beginning of this period that the Kaydnerenh Kowa was formed, for we find the Caniengas and their younger brothers, the Oneidas, now taking up for the first time the secure territory then vacant, adjoining the Sinnekes on the west, and where they are found by the whites at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The bond of sympathy appears to have been a common hatred of the Hurons, for the dialects of the two branches were unlike;—curiously enough, that of the Caniengas was almost pure Huron, showing that they had broken off from the Huron body only a few generations before. The story of the founding of the League has been preserved with considerable accuracy on some points by Iroquois tradition. According to it, Hiawatha was a warrior of Onondaga, the most warlike tribe of the group. The dreaded chief Atotarho ("the Entangled") then swayed the tribe, and by expeditions and intrigues plunged both his nation and those around it into a nightmare of carnage. Hiawatha, tradition says, was driven by the sufferings around him to reflect upon the advantages of peace, and to evolve the idea of a firm confederation which should for ever abolish the evils of war, and in time include all peoples. On a given day during two successive years he attempted to induce the Onondagas to accept his plan, but on each occasion the armed, silent, and threatening appearance of Atotarho and his warriors at the place of meeting melted the assembly, and ultimately drove the reformer to despair. Then followed the flight of

Hiawatha, the Hegira of the Iroquois. He left the Onondaga country and travelled alone eastwards to that of the Mohawks, through the land of the Oneidas, many legendary marvels accompanying his journey. Being adopted by the Mohawks, continues the story, he remained among them, and his descendant, the Hiawatha of to-day, takes his place in the Grand Council as a chief, not of the Onondagas, but of the Mohawks. It was with the assistance of the latter and from their villages that he thenceforth prosecuted his propaganda.

I venture at this juncture to doubt once more the traditional view, and to suspect something stronger than adoption in the Mohawk status of Hiawatha. Tradition has nowhere shown itself a more fallible guide than in Iroquois history. On the other hand, archæology demonstrates that the events now in question took place at a most fateful epoch. As we have seen, the Mohawks and their younger brothers, the Oneidas, had only recently entered the territory adjoining the Onondagas. Their original palisaded capital Hochelaga, on the island of Montreal, which had been visited in 1535 by Jacques Cartier, and approached in 1542, had been sacked and burnt at some time about 1560, and the remnants of the race were driven down Lake Champlain by adventurous Hurons from the west, allies of the Algonquins. Hard pressed there every summer, the Hochelagans retreated along the waterways, first to the foot of the lake, and then further to Lake George, until they finally sought a secure shelter for their women and children in the pine-topped hills and fastnesses of the deserted valley of the river afterwards called

the Mohawk. Peace with the powerful Onondagas, the "People of the Hills," was a precious necessity to them. All accounts agree that the new-comers were the first converts to Hiawatha's propaganda. Under these circumstances I confess a distrust in the tradition that Hiawatha, the Mohawk, was originally an Onondaga, and I find it more probable that he had always been a Mohawk, who had spent some time among the Onondagas, and then returned to his own people, thus forming a link between the two.

Among the Mohawks (Caniengas) he found a kindred spirit in the influential Dekanawidah, who by aid of his six active brothers stood high in the councils of the tribe. "The sagacity of the Canienga chief," said Hale ('Book of Rites,' p. 25), "grasped at once the advantages of the proposed plan, and the two worked together in perfecting it, and in commending it to the people. After much discussion in council the adhesion of the Canienga nation was secured. Dekanawidah then despatched two of his brothers as ambassadors to the nearest tribe, the Oneidas, to lay the project before them. The Oneida nation is considered a comparatively recent offshoot from the Caniengas. The ambassadors found the leading chief, Odatsehte, at his town on the Oneida Creek. He received their message in a friendly way. 'Come back in another day,' he said,—which was to say in a year. So at a year's end the two nations met, and their chiefs struck the treaty which first established the Kayanerenh Kowa." I take leave here again to doubt the exactitude of the tradition, and to question how far a league of peace

was necessary at that time between these two offshoots of the Hochelagan race. But at any rate Dekanawidah led a mission back to the Onondagas proposing the subject, which would evidently have been at once rejected had it come from Hiawatha. It was, in fact, rejected by Atotarho, but Dekanawidah and the ambassadors pushed on to the Cayuga nation, an offshoot of the Onondagas, whose land lay further westward. They readily consented, and their chief, Akahenyon ("the Wary Spy"), joined the Canienga and Oneida representatives in a new embassy to the Onondagas, to whom they made flattering proposals. The Onondagas should be the leading nation of the confederacy. At their chief town the council fire of the League should be perpetually lit, there the Pine Tree of Peace should lift its head, fourteen chiefs should hold for them the place of honour at the Great Councils, while no other nation should have more than ten. Atotarho should be the leading chief of the confederation, and these rights and dignities, like the other elements of the constitution of the Great Council and of the League, should continue to descend unchanged through all succeeding generations. The Onondagas accepted, and Atotarho took up the work with enthusiasm, proposing the addition of the fifth nation, the Senecas, whose populous towns and broad territory lay more westerly still beyond the Cayugas. These consented through their chiefs, Kanyadariyo and Shadekaronyes, and finally the five nations met at a spot on the north shore of the Salt Lake of Onondaga, near the present city of Syracuse, where they founded the complete league, "The Silver Chain,"

as they loved to call it in after days. Modern tradition ascribes to Hiawatha's idea the scheme of a universal brotherhood of mankind, and a universal peace. He is even constituted into a kind of Christ by estimable "Pagans" or Deistic Mohawks, and some believe in his continued incarnation once in every generation. It is scarcely likely, however, that he contemplated a broader federation than that of the five nations, and of any other surrounding peoples who might strike an ordinary Indian compact with them, or become incorporated with them by conquest or adoption, methods which already had a place in the system of Iroquois usages. Nor does he seem to have made any efforts to prevent torture or cannibalism. Even thus limited his plan was a large and noble one. The details were well conceived. A fixed number of chiefs were to represent each of the nations; fourteen the Onondagas, nine each the Caniengas and Oneidas, ten the Cayugas, and eight the Senecas. The numbers were no doubt regulated by a nice diplomacy, based upon the claims of the chiefs then in power, and the jealousies of the tribes. But once formed, all subsequent difficulties were to be silenced by the provision that the representation should be unchangeable and hereditary in the families of the chiefs. By this provision Iroquois politics were lifted at one stroke out of the fleeting and wavering devices of savage government, and endowed with permanency and solid statecraft. On the death of an Atotarho, a Hiawatha, or a Tekarihoken, his successor was, and still is, chosen by the chief matron of his family from among his male relatives through the female

line, his brother or maternal half-brother, his cousin or nephew, but never his son. Here we have that mysterious *mother-right* which in one form or another stamps the Turanian races,—the rule of the eldest matron over the household, the control by the woman of her children, the counting of descent through her, which was the only system possible under the institutions of polyandry then general among the Huron-Iroquois. In Britain we find it as a trace of the ancient race in the descent of the Pictish kings, in the description of the British marriage customs in Cæsar, and perhaps in the pre-eminence of Boadicea.

Dekanawidah refused to accept the right of leaving a successor. Tradition says that he did so because, as founder of the League, he wished that glory to die with himself.

The roll of the Grand Council on the reservation at Brantford, Ontario, to-day, which illustrates the tenacity of the institution, is as follows for the Mohawk section :

Tehkarihoken	. "Double Speech."
Hiawatha	. "Seeker of the Wampum Belt."
Shatekariwate	. "Two Equal Statements."
Sharenhowane	. "Loftiest Tree."
Deyonhehgweh	. "Double Life."
Orenrehgowah	. "High Hill."
Dehennakarine	. "Going with Two Horses."
Rastawehserondah	. "Holding the Rattles."
Sosskoharonwaneh	. "He is a Great Woodrift."

Of the nine Oneidas headed by the Odatsehte, three are extinct.

Of the Onondagas, who are headed by the Atotarho, fifteen appear, but two are extinct.

The Cayugas, headed by the Tekahonyonk, have eleven on the roll, of whom three are extinct.

Of the nine Senecas, headed by the Skanyadariyo and the Shadekaronyes, three are extinct.

New tribes, the Tuscaroras, Nanticokes, and Delawares, add seven living chiefs, and the Tuscaroras nine extinct titles.

In connection with one function of the Council, that of condolence with the family of a deceased chief, and at the same time of "raising" his successor, an ancient ritual has survived to which Mr. Hale has given publicity in his 'Book of Rites,' and which serves to throw some dim and scanty but interesting and suggestive light on the foregoing events. The chiefs sit in order around the Council Chamber, or "Long House," a term which has a forgotten reference to one of the large communal homes of bygone Iroquois towns. The orator walks up and down, in accordance with one of the earliest customs, and in doing so laments in prescribed words the degeneracy of the times:

"Now listen, ye who established the Great League. Now it has become old. Now there is nothing but wilderness. Ye have taken it with you, and have placed it under you, and there is nothing left but a desert. There ye have taken your intellects with you. What ye established ye have taken with you. Ye have placed under your heads what ye established—the Great League. Now, then, hearken, ye who were rulers and founders."

The chiefs take up the responses, led by the

Mohawks through their principal chief Tehkarihoken,
and call each upon his ancestor of the original
Council :

"Tehkarihoken,
Continue to listen,
Thou who wert ruler."

"Hiawatha,
Continue to listen,
Thou who wert ruler."

"Shadekarihwade,
That was this roll of you,
You who were joined in the work,
You who completed the work,
The Kayanerenh Kowa."

"Continue to listen,
Thou who wert ruler."

"Tehayatkwayen,
That was the roll of you.
Then his son,—
He is the Great Wolf.
There were combined
The many minds."

"Hononwirehdonh,
That was the roll of you,
These were his uncles,
Of the two clans
Kaweneseaghtonh,
Hahihnonh !
That was the roll of them."

And so on, with certain variations around the
circle of the chiefs.

"Then in later times
They made additions
To the great house.
These were at the doorway,
They two were cousins,
These two guarded the doorway."

The reference to the "doorway" is to the figurative office of the two leading Seneca chiefs as the doorkeepers of the Long House, from the situation of the country of their tribe at the western end of the confederacy. The term "Long House" was applied figuratively to the confederacy as well as literally in later times to the Council Lodge.

The effects of Hiawatha's work began to show at once. If the Onondagas had been strong before, their strength became fivefold more effective towards outsiders. The Mohawks ceased to fall back from point to point and lake to lake in the Hochelagan war, and returning in parties became a veritable scourge upon their enemies in the St. Lawrence valley. The Hurons, populous and united, had hitherto dominated the surrounding peoples with a ruthless pride, and not only carried on the war with the Caniengas in the east, which they had begun by the sack of Hochelaga, but had been accustomed to successfully invade the Onondaga country in the west as a separate enterprise. The Silver Chain, growing in statecraft and audacity, gradually altered the situation. On the advent of Champlain in 1611 he was appealed to by the Hurons for assistance, and by bold action and the advantage of firearms checked for a time the advance of the Leaguers. But shortly afterwards the Five Nations acquired

firearms in their turn from the Dutch of the Hudson River, and in less than a generation the proud and powerful Hurons were blotted out of existence. No such chapter of savage success as followed has probably ever been written on the sands of time, except that of the German tribes who swept over Europe. The conduct of the Suevi in keeping a tract of six hundred miles long free of living beings except themselves has a strong likeness to the doings of the Iroquois confederacy; and the dauntless courage of the Gothic races, exemplified in the favourite Vandal epitaph relating to the laugh of the warrior at death—"He fell, he laughed, he died,"—had innumerable parallels in the jocular scorn of the Iroquois braves under torture. Not long after the destruction of the Hurons the turn of the Neutral Nation came; the Eries or Cats followed; then the Nation of Fire; the Micmacs of Nova Scotia; the Abenaki of New England; the Mohicans and Delawares of the Hudson; the Pawnees of the far western prairies; the Algonquins of the northern forests; and the distant Iroquois kindred, the town-building Cherokees, a thousand miles to the south, were attacked. So, throughout most of the North American continent, the name of the Kanonsionni, the People of the Long House, was held in dread. But their policy, constantly discussed and shaped by keen brains and eloquent tongues, was not one of simple bloodshed. Kind and patient amongst themselves, intense lovers of children, and faithful and truthful to friends, they treated not ungently the majority of those they had conquered, and in after days a Jesuit Father, who knew them well, remarked that the greater part of

their own people were the descendants of incorporated remnants of their defeated foes.

The abiding impress of the League upon history was, however, made by its effects against France in the Anglo-Gallic struggle for control in North America. Champlain, by his interferences on the side of the Hurons, had unwittingly stirred up a most formidable nest of hornets. It is needless to enter into details of the century and a half of fierce wars which followed. It was the bitter and terrible warfare of the Iroquois against French colonisation in Canada which rendered the final success of the British inevitable. In 1686 the Canadian colonists only numbered some 10,000, against 200,000 estimated in the British colonies; yet the supreme spurt in the colonisation of New France had just been put forth under Colbert; and that was previous to the Iroquois deluge of blood in 1689, and to the "Seventy Years' War."

Hiawatha is consequently a factor of considerable importance in the history of the world. His thought and work still live, and they will live for ever. Keen, lofty, and good as was his idea, he evidently, like other masters, "builded better than he knew." And if, apart from the profound political results, the aroma of his idea, distilled in poetry and romance, or refined in historical reflection, shall go on inspiring other men to be in some degree nobler in their own manner and day,—then the Lawgiver of the Forest, the Christ of his race, has amply earned the title of Hiawatha the Great.

